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ABSTRACT

Environmental assessment, which involves examining the perceptions of people in a given environment or social climate (socially agreed upon norms for acceptable behaviors) is one method of placing behavior in context. The University of Maryland, College Park, conducted a student survey in order to examine the social climate through a study of subgroup differences in perceptions of social sanctions as a function of sex and race. Incoming freshmen (N=390, 47% male, 53% female, 80% white, 13% black, and 7% others), completed an anonymous 35-item questionnaire. The questionnaire contained items on contemporary issues, racial concerns, and beliefs. Respondents rated each item on a five-point scale, from strongly positive to strongly negative, according to how they believed most college students felt about persons holding certain values or beliefs. Analyses of results showed that race was significant on 11 of the 35 items; sex was significant on 9 items; and the interaction of race and sex was significant on 2 items. Blacks in the study tended to hold liberal views, while whites tended to be more conservative. Other racial groups had views that fell in between these two groups. Males held more conservative views than females. The findings demonstrate that each subgroup has its own psychosocial norms and expectancies. Attitudes and behavior must continue to be placed in the phenomonological world of the persons involved. (MCF)

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Alyce C. Martinez and William E. Sedlacek

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Summary

Three hundred ninety incoming freshmen attending the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), responded to an anonymous questionnaire designed to elicit perceptions of social norms. A two-way analysis of variance was conducted for each item, using race and sex as main effects with Student-Newman-Keuls post hoc tests. Race was significant in 11 of the 35 items, sex was significant in nine items, and the interaction of race and sex was significant in two items. Race and sex differences are explained in terms of liberalism and conservatism. Blacks in the study tended to hold liberal views, while whites tended to be more conservative. Other racial groups had views that fell in between these two groups. In terms of sex differences, males held more conservative views than did females. Continued examination of subgroup differences is suggested.

In recent years increasing attention has been focused on the "environment" portion of the equation: behavior = f (person x environment). Environmental assessment, through gathering data that is descriptive of a population and its relationships with the environment, is one method used to understand intact social units (Coyne, et al, 1979).

One way to assess the environment is to examine the perceptions of people within that given environment. The term "climate" has been used by Schneider (1975) to describe the "molar perceptions people have of their setting...(which are) necessary as a frame of reference for gauging the appropriateness of behavior" (p. 473). The social climate, therefore, is defined by the socially agreed upon norms for acceptable behavior. As such, it allows us to place behavior in a context.

When we apply this concept to the college student population, it helps us understand the students' world; in effect it helps us see the campus through the students' eyes. Social climate research has shown, for example, that students' political attitudes became more conservative between 1970 and 1981. In contrast, there have been comparatively little or no changes in perceptions of racial attitudes (Martinez & Sedlacek, in press). Racist attitudes continue to be negatively reinforced in the campus environment.

In the Martinez and Sedlacek study, data were gathered on a sample of white college students. Little is known about the social climate perceptions of other segments of the student population however; for example, Webster, Sedlacek and Miyares (1979) found that some campus environment problems were common to all students, but that others were unique to minority group members. Further, within the minority population there are differences in the attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of blacks, Asians, and Hispanics (Patterson &

Sedlacek, 1979). Thus, conceptualizations of a "prototypical average student" may not represent the experiences of many subgroups within the total population (Minatoya & Sedlacek, 1980).

In addition to racial subgroup differences, consistent sex differences continue to be shown on personality and attitude variables, particularly regarding social orientation (American Council on Education, 1971). One might, therefore, expect sex differences in male and female perceptions of the social climate.

The purpose of the present study was to examine further the social climate on a college campus by examining subgroup differences in perceptions of social sanctions as a function of sex and race.

Method

Three hundred ninety incoming freshmen at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) were administered an anonymous 35 item questionnaire designed to elicit perceptions of the social climate. The questionnaire was an updated version of a poll developed by Sedlacek and Brooks (1971), and contained items based on contemporary issues, racial concerns, and beliefs derived from Rokeach, Smith, and Evans (1960). Using a method similar to that used by Thurstone (Thurstone & Chave, 1929), respondents were asked to rate each item according to how they believed most college students felt about persons holding certain values or beliefs on a 5-point scale, from strongly positive to strongly negative.

The sample was 47% male and 53% female, 80% white, 13% black, 4% Asian-American, and 3% Hispanic. One student indicated he was American Indian. Because of the small percentages of Asians, Hispanics, and American Indians, the responses of these groups were combined for the purpose of analysis and group comparisons were made between blacks, whites, and others.

Results and Discussion

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted for each item, using race and sex as main effects and Student-Newman-Keuls post hoc tests (see Table 1).

Race Differences

Race was significant on 11 of the 35 items; sex was significant on nine items; and two items were significant due to the interaction of race and sex.

Of the items significant by race, several seem to relate to liberal vs conservative perceptions with black students tending to feel most college students had more liberal views. For example, white students were more likely to feel most students favored current conservative U.S. foreign policy, while minority students did not. Black students particularly tended to feel there was more negative feelings toward those favoring the space program, but more positive feelings toward socialists and those favoring labor unions. Unlike blacks, other minorities felt there was more negativity toward those who were pro-labor union. It may be that blacks tended to feel programs and policies associated with the government were less supported by students because such policies were not seen as having benefitted blacks in the past. For example, they may have seen budgetary allowances for the space program as a threat to allocations toward social programs needed in the community.

Although six questionnaire items dealt with racial issues, only one was significant by race: "someone for gradual desegregation." In the present study, white students were more likely to feel gradual desegregation was accepted by college students than were blacks. However, in a related study, Martinez and Sedlacek (in press) found that white students perceived less overall acceptance by students of gradual desegregation in 1981 than in 1970.

The authors had interpreted this finding as indicating that white college students were currently less concerned with racial issues, particularly desegregation. The present study, indicating the divergent views of blacks and whites on this subject, might be seen as confirmatory evidence for this hypothesis. It may be that blacks unlike whites, will not accept that desegregation should be accomplished gradually; rather, they seek more rapid social action.

On social issues blacks tended to see more conservatism among college students regarding sex, drugs, and religion than whites. Blacks tended to see less acceptance than whites did for those favoring permarital sex; those using marijuana or cocaine; and atheists. On items dealing with dishonesty, however, blacks saw more social acceptance for thieves and untrustworthy persons than did whites. It is somewhat unclear what these results mean. One possibility is that blacks have a strict codes regarding personal values, but also understand the social and economic pressures that may lead someone to be dishonest.

Sex Differences

The sex differences found in this study reflected both sociopolitical and personal themes. In the area of social and political themes, males saw students as more conservative than did females. Males thought students were more positive toward conservatives, those favoring the space program, and those who oppose affirmative action. Males were also more likely to see students as positive toward someone who feels protest is never justified. These results may be indicating that currently males are more satisfied with the status quo, and perhaps feel threatened by affirmative action and other policies brought about by the social protest movements of the late 1960's and early 1970's.

Males also tended to see more negativity toward atheists and homosexuals, people who have non-traditional beliefs and/or personal lifestyles. In terms of sexuality, females were more likely to see conservative attitudes as the norm. Females perceive a more positive atmosphere for virginity on campus and a more negative one for those favoring premarital sex than did males. This may be due either to the double standard in which it is more important for women to maintain their virginity, or perhaps because many of the students have not yet had their first sexual experience (Patterson & Sedlacek, 1982). The other item indicating sex differences dealt with cigarette smoking. Females saw more acceptance of cigarette smokers. This may not be surprising since cigarette smokers in this age group tend to be female (McKillip & Vierke, 1980; Wechsler & Gottlieb, 1979).

Two items were significant due to the interaction of sex and race. The first dealt with persons who favor the space program. Black females and "other race" males viewed those favoring the space program particularly more negatively than did other groups. As discussed earlier, there were main effect differences for race and sex on this item as well, with blacks and females overall perceiving negative views.

The second item significant due to the sex and race interaction concerned attitudes toward members of the Ku Klux Klan. Black males and white females perceived more negative reinforcement for KKK members than did other groups. The response of white females may be due to feelings of vulnerability. Research indicates that in comparison to white males, white females react negatively to blacks in situations involving a perceived threat of physical harm (Johnson & Sedlacek, 1979; Sedlacek & Brooks, 1972). Although of the same

race, it may be that the violent incidents associated with the KKK (e.g., cross burnings and lynchings) stimulated the white females to react particularly negatively toward the group.

Overall the data confirm that college students are not a homogeneous group and that minorities within that population are not homogeneous either. The most striking race differences can be explained in terms of the differences between liberals and conservatives. Black students in the study tended to see the social norms as more liberal, while white students saw the climate as more conservative. The views of other minority groups (Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans) tended to fall in between the two groups. Sex differences could also be explained in terms of liberalism and conservatism, with males perceiving more conservative views than did females.

Thus the present study demonstrated that each subgroup has its own psychosocial norms and expectancies. Attitudes and behavior must, therefore, continue to be placed in the context of the phenomenological world of the persons involved. Future research should continue to examine differences among various minority subgroups as well as black vs white and sex differences.

This research should include perceived social norms as well as attitudes and behaviors of individuals. Martinez and Sedlacek (1982) have demonstrated these are areas which are independent of one another. Examining each area is important in achieving an overall understanding of what is happening at a college or university, and how to plan programs and provide services. This study clearly shows that students are dealing on different campuses, depending on their race and sex. Helping students to recognize that there is more than one way to look at the campus, and what form those differences take, could be included in orientation, counseling and advising programs.

Also, a program which concentrates on disseminating information about how different groups of students really feel about various issues compared to their perceptions of acceptable behavior may do a great deal to help those students adjust to college life.

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TABLE 1

Perceptions of How Most College Students Feel About Persons Holding

Certain Values or Beliefs by Race and Sex

Means[1], Standard Deviations, and Results of Analysis of Varience

Item #	Value/Belief	MALE						FEMALE						SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES at .05[2]
		BLACK		WHITE		OTHER		BLACK		WHITE		OTHER		
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
1	Atheist	3.93	.80	3.47	.82	3.54	.97	3.62	.79	3.36	.68	3.17	1.03	R, S
2	Homosexual	4.73	.59	4.59	.61	4.62	.65	4.24	.86	4.24	.80	3.92	1.12	S
3	Bigot	4.43	.76	4.05	.78	3.85	.69	4.16	.80	4.11	.75	4.00	.74	
4	Pro-Labor Union	2.53	.92	2.84	.71	2.92	.76	2.62	.95	2.77	.58	3.15	.80	R
5	Communist	4.20	.86	4.45	.74	4.23	.83	4.30	.81	4.50	.67	4.31	.85	
6	Racist	4.40	.83	4.19	.79	4.23	.60	4.43	.73	4.19	.74	4.23	1.17	
7	Favor U.S. Foreign Policy	2.67	.98	2.52	.84	3.00	.58	2.95	.81	2.54	.77	3.00	.71	R
8	Alcoholic	4.00	1.13	3.82	.89	3.85	.69	3.97	.80	3.75	.74	4.00	.74	
9	Favor Premarital Sex	2.20	.77	2.11	.82	2.54	.97	2.62	.76	2.27	.84	2.54	1.05	R, S
10	Liberal	2.33	.82	2.42	.81	2.69	1.25	2.64	.87	2.37	.88	2.54	.66	
11	Against Interracial Frats	4.27	.80	3.78	.93	3.69	.85	3.84	.99	3.71	.86	3.62	.77	
12	Socialist	2.93	.88	3.37	.83	3.31	1.18	2.94	.95	3.24	.76	3.38	.77	R

TABLE 1

(Continued)

Item #	Value/Belief	MALE						FEMALE						SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES at .05[2]
		BLACK		WHITE		OTHER		BLACK		WHITE		OTHER		
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
13	Believe Race Differences	3.80	1.21	3.53	1.03	3.46	1.13	3.83	.91	3.58	1.01	3.62	1.04	
14	Favor Space Program	1.87	1.13	1.90	.83	2.15	.69	2.59	.76	2.03	.80	2.08	.76	R, S, RxS
15	Cigarette Smoker	3.67	1.05	3.42	.89	3.23	.83	3.08	.95	3.10	.72	3.23	.73	S
16	Gradual Desegregation	3.40	1.24	3.02	.98	3.15	.38	3.56	1.05	2.96	.90	3.54	.88	R
17	Conservative	3.00	.76	2.85	.78	2.85	.80	3.19	.81	3.03	.75	3.23	.44	S
18	Cheats on Exams	3.80	.86	3.79	.74	3.62	.77	3.92	.95	3.87	.76	4.08	.86	
19	Marijuana Smoker	3.60	.99	2.95	.86	3.62	.87	3.11	.94	2.95	.79	3.54	.97	R
20	Virgin	3.40	1.30	3.13	.83	3.08	.86	2.70	.94	3.04	.77	3.00	.71	S
21	Heroin User	4.33	.90	4.57	.66	4.31	.75	4.39	.60	4.51	.60	4.62	.51	
22	Moral Majority	3.40	1.12	3.31	.97	3.42	1.00	3.36	.90	3.19	.90	3.38	.96	
23	Speed User	4.40	.74	4.01	.81	3.85	1.14	4.17	.77	4.05	.80	4.25	.97	
24	Anti-affirmative Action	3.33	.82	3.43	.73	3.08	.76	3.42	.69	3.62	.68	3.69	.75	S

TABLE 1

(Continued)

Item #	Value/Belief	MALE						FEMALE						SIGNIFICANT DIFFERNECES at .05[2]
		BLACK		WHITE		OTHER		BLACK		WHITE		OTHER		
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
25	Protest Never Justified	3.40	.51	3.66	.77	3.54	.78	3.78	.76	3.81	.71	3.54	.78	S
26	Sexist	3.80	1.15	3.76	.73	3.46	.78	3.83	.81	3.96	.77	3.85	.69	
27	Untrustworthy	4.20	.94	4.42	.60	4.31	.75	4.22	.93	4.51	.60	4.77	.44	R
28	Reactionary	3.29	.61	3.45	.68	3.67	.65	3.26	.66	3.54	.73	3.46	.97	
29	Thief	4.47	.64	4.72	.51	4.77	.44	4.47	.88	4.72	.48	4.85	.38	R
30	Lesbian	4.47	.75	4.34	.80	4.46	.66	4.06	.86	4.28	.74	4.38	.65	
31	KKK Member	4.87	.35	4.39	.87	4.69	.48	4.31	.86	4.60	.56	4.69	.63	RxS
32	Cocaine User	4.33	.72	3.89	.90	4.15	.99	4.11	.82	3.96	.87	4.31	.75	R
33	Embezzler	4.20	.86	4.35	.68	4.38	.51	4.11	.85	4.36	.66	4.17	.83	
34	Cheat on Taxes	3.47	.99	3.59	.86	3.75	.87	3.56	1.03	3.72	.85	3.54	.88	
35	Anti Legal Abortion	3.40	1.12	3.50	.84	3.38	.96	3.47	.77	3.49	.82	3.15	.99	

[1] 1 = Strongly Positive to 5 = Strongly Negative

[2] Results of 2-way ANOVA (fixed effects) with R (Race) and S (Sex) as main effects and R x S as the interaction. Complete ANOVA tables available from William Sedlacek, Counseling Center, UMCP.